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# THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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## CALIFORNIA MISSION MEETING

by DORIS E. FOSTER

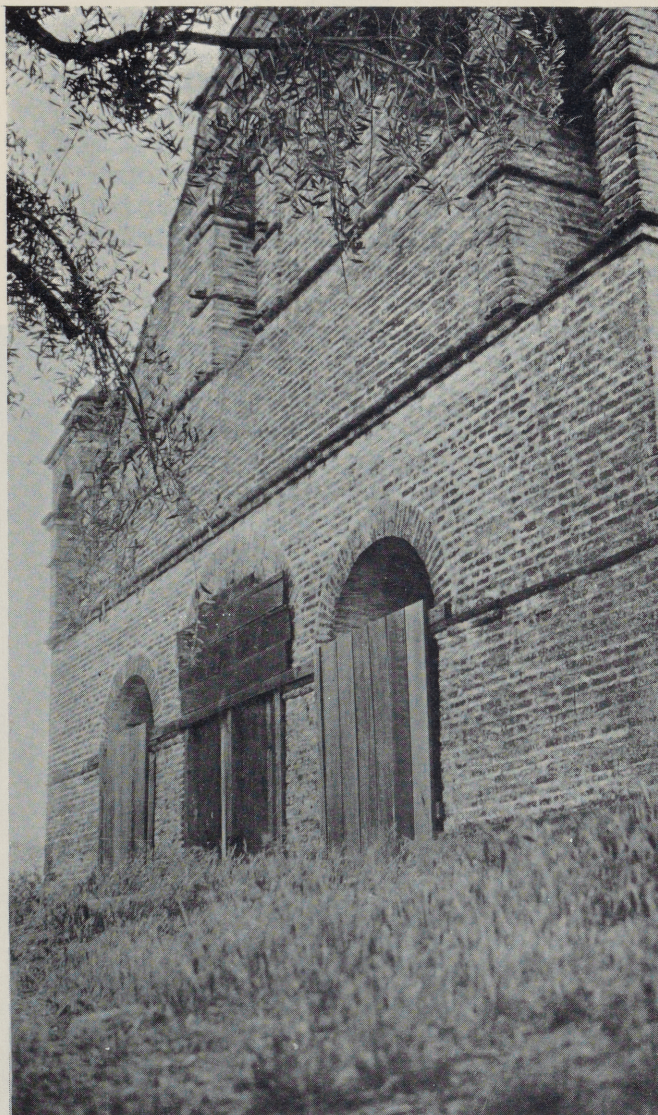
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On Sunday, May 14, 1961, at 9 a.m. all the delegates met near Mission San Miguel for a motorcade to Mission San Antonio, which is located in Monterey County, 23 miles south of King City, near Jolon. It was a very pleasant and interesting 45 minute drive on a winding road far from the highway to Mission San Antonio, which is located on a beautiful site in a tree-covered valley.

The Mission seemed very remote from everything belonging to our day. But its seclusion added to its charm and beauty. It is the most isolated of all the missions. This "Valley of the Oaks" is a quiet haven of peace and natural beauty. And the first glimpse brought the belief that this lovely spot could have inspired the beautiful poem of Lowell Otus Reese:

"Here and there they have set  
Aside a few old trees, with  
Their arms still wide to the  
Winds of God, and the reverent  
Hears the whispering tongues  
Of a thousand years."

5800 foot Junipero Serra Peak looks down upon the present Mission, and this same peak in early days was a favorite look-out of the Indians. There is a wide expanse of level farm  
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The facade of Mission San Antonio stands in front of the church wall providing an enclosed entrance. Here we view it before its restoration as photographed by Nathan C. Sweet in 1920.



## FIRST ANNUAL CALIFORNIA MISSION MEETING

land directly in front of the Mission and to the back flows the San Antonio River, named by Serra for the saint whose mission this was to be.

Immediately upon arrival at Mission San Antonio the delegates began an extensive tour of the buildings and grounds. Father David Temple was the host and guide, and he directed the group through several rooms in which were installed miniature reproductions of the original Mission gristmill, the olive press, the wine press and the very elaborate reservoir system. All of these models and their relative figures were electrically operated. In the last of this series of rooms was a model of the Mission Church, and adjacent buildings which had been built to scale by the Franciscan Novices.

The old kitchen, with its clay and copper pots, brick and mortar stoves, was visited, and then on to the blacksmith shop with its hand-made tools, including those used for farming and those used to make the adobe bricks and tiles used in construction of the Mission.

Downstairs the group was shown a very impressive and elaborate wine vat, which was built on two levels for settling purposes. It was built of brick and the original construction.

A tour of the grounds was made and the group was shown a great number of the current excavations, which have already unearthed many, many relics of the original Mission. These excavations included the tanning vats, the grist mill and its water wheel which is now restored to its original form, the Indian girl's dormitory, and the seed hut.

Then the group visited the excavation site of the very elaborate water and irrigation system, which

was a very remarkable operation. "By means of dams, open flumes, masonry conduits across gulches, and troughs in places hollowed out of the sandstone cliffs, the Padres succeeded in bringing the water across to a storage pond near the Mission plaza." Thus the Mission was assured a steady supply of water and by means of an endless chain system of buckets, the water was deposited into a second reservoir which was then diverted through clay pipes to the garden and the orchard. This unique water lifting and distributing device is again in operation.

Long before the 49'ers, and even long before the Spanish Dons, the missions were here. Though there were 21 missions established in 54 years in California, only four are now under the control of the Franciscan Fathers. Padre Junipero Serra was the founder of the mission chain. He had come to Mexico at the age of 36 on December 5, 1749. In 1767 the Spanish Government banished the Jesuit Order from all its dominions, and in 1768 when they left Mexico and Baja, California, they were replaced by the Franciscan Order. Serra led his party to the new field, and under his leadership, Mission San Antonio was founded on July 14, 1771, by two Padres, six soldiers and three sailors. Serra died at Carmel on August 28, 1784.

It is estimated there were 135,000 Indians in California about this time and many different tribes speaking some 135 distinct dialects. Some early writers described the Indians as "wretched" at the time of the coming of the Padres. Others stated that the Indians were "almost naked, half starved, living in little hovels built of tule, had no laws and few customs." When Cabrillo, the first white man whom we know visited the Indians of the Coast of California, made his memorable journey in 1542, he described the Indians as "timid,



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and somewhat hostile but easily appeased." George James in his book written about 1904 says that "Indians like other people are not to be judged by the clothes they wear or do not wear."

We do know that the Indians were skilled in many arts: the making of pottery, basketry, canoes, stone axes, arrow heads and the like. And in a few short years the Indians became very competent in many fields of skilled labor. "People are not civilized nor educated in a day." So the Indians must have had the mental qualities to learn, and the results of their artistry certainly puts them upon a superior plane. In many cases the Indians asked for missions to be built, having learned

of the Padres and their work from friends and relatives at other missions.

And so the missions were established in order to christianize, civilize and educate these primitive Indians. The missions were more than churches; they were the system whose purpose was to make the Indians members of a civilized society. Therefore the missions were church, school, city, farm and home all under one roof. The Indians went to the missions of their own free choice and looked to the Padres for every need of soul and body. In most cases the Padres were received very kindly by the Indians.

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Tile from the hands of the Indians tops adobe brick of this lovely old colonnade at Mission San Antonio. Photo by Nathan C. Sweet



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The Padres did their work without a single motive that we can now recognize as self-interested. It was a kind and loving service. The Indians in the region of Mission San Antonio were known as Salinans, speaking the Mutsun dialect.

Before the church of Mission San Antonio was built, the bells for it were hung on an oak limb, the large cross erected and Mass was said in the open. This was the beginning of the Mission. Later, crops were planted and there were extensive orchards and vineyards started. The Padres had brought to the New World the finest cuttings and seeds for their mission fields and gardens. These, without doubt, became the parent orchards of California's fruit industry. Cattle became plentiful, numbering about 8000. Hides from the slaughtered cattle were tanned at the Mission and worked into saddles and harness pieces. There were more than 50 different trades at the Mission, including those for both men and women.

The group of delegates were next taken to the large threshing floor where the grain was threshed out with flails and/or horses. In this same area was found the whip saw platform used to cut the timbers, and also the adobe brick and tile yards. All of the Mission roofs were covered with tile made by the Indians. During the present restoration the same type of tile is made by the Mission Novices. Tied to the hitching rack in front of the Mission was a yoke of oxen complete with wooden-wheeled cart, which the Fathers and the Novices now use for transportation of adobe brick, tile and other material used in the restorations.

About the time that most of the delegate group had seen the outdoor buildings and excavations, the regular Sunday church service had been terminated in the Mission Church and

the group was taken there. This building was begun in 1810 and completed in three years. It measures 40 feet wide by 200 feet long. The floor of the church is different from other California Missions in that it is constructed not of tile, but of a hard plaster put down over cobblestones. The most unusual and interesting feature of the church is the vaulted ceiling of the enclosed entry. It is said to have been built by filling the space with a great mound of dirt on which the dome was moulded in an immense half-circle from floor to ceiling. Then the dirt was removed from below.

Three arched doorways, the central one higher and wider than the two others give the enclosed entry of the Mission "great dignity". Above the central doorway rises an arched bell niche in which hangs a great bell. The facade is unique among the missions in standing some dozen feet in advance of the front wall of the church to provide an enclosed entrance. (See photo on Page 1.)

In 1845 the Mexican Franciscans decided to sell Mission San Antonio, but there were no buyers so the church was deserted. No doubt the isolation of the Mission saved it the disgrace of passing into disinterested hands. Then 84 years passed before the Mission was returned to the Franciscan Order in 1928. But about 1900, salvage and restoration of the Mission began.

After the visit to the church the delegates were taken to the inner courtyard, which is very large and very beautiful. In one corner of the yard stood one of the original pear trees of long ago Mission days. Most of the courtyard is planted to roses, almost every known variety. Once a year, in January, cuttings of the roses are given away to the public and every May the blooms are shared with anyone who wants them. It was

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## THE GENTLEMAN STAGE ROBBER - SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

by

KENNETH C. HOPPER

Editor's Note: "The Gentleman Stage Robber" (Volume II - Number 3) was such a success with our readers, we offer Kenneth Hopper's sequel to his true-life adventure for your reading pleasure

\* \* \* \* \*

Sixteen years had passed since that memorable experience with the friendly highwayman on the Questa grade. My wife and I, with our small daughter, had come over from Honolulu on a combined business and pleasure trip.

After a few days of sightseeing in San Francisco we boarded a Southern Pacific train and proceeded south to San Luis Obispo. Our entry into the little city did not cause the excitement and commotion that my first visit had; in fact, the populace did not know we had arrived.

We transferred here to the little narrow gauge railway that runs down through the central valley to Santa Maria and on to Los Olivos. I had relatives in Los Olivos and after visiting with them a few days, left my wife and baby there while I went on south to Santa Barbara where I had some business to attend to.

Now to get from Los Olivos to Santa Barbara at that time, you had to take a stage to Gaviota where you took the Southern Pacific train on to Santa Barbara

I went over to the stage station, which was at Mattei's Tavern, to get my ticket for the twenty-mile stage ride to Gaviota. I asked for the stage driver and a traveling salesman pointed him out to me. I saw an old gray-haired man of at least 70



Smiling at us from above are Gertrude and Kenneth Hopper, seated beside their former home at Indian Peak. You read of some of their life there in Gertrude's description in our April, 1962, issue.

We regret Kenneth is not with us these days, however, you will hear more from them in future issues.

Photo by Nathan C. Sweet

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years standing by a small, two-horse open stage. His face seemed familiar - I had seen that man before some

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THE GENTLEMAN STAGE ROBBER - SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

time, somewhere.

I walked over and told him I was going to be one of his passengers.

"That's fine. Might be glad to have you," he said.

Instantly I was carried back sixteen years to the night on Questa grade. That voice! Sure. It was Jim Myers!

Jim Myers on the last little dinky run that the railroads had left him. Jim Myers, still straight and slender, with the same twinkle in his eyes and the same jovial smile on his rugged face, down to his last run.

Although Jim's eyes still had their old smile in them, you could also see memory - memory of the by-gone days when he was the crack driver of the handsome big red and gold six-horse concord stages which played down the length of the Salinas Valley. He had been the hero of every boy and girl along his runs. They used to stand by the roadside and wave as he went galloping by and received in return his cheery salute and an exhibition of his skill with his long six-horse whip as the lash picked an imaginary fly off the rump of the near leader with the report of a six-shooter.

Memories and emotions raced through my mind as I looked into his face; regrets, too, for the passing of those glamorous days that he so colorfully typified.

"You are Jim Myers, aren't you?" I asked.

"Yes, that's my name," he replied.

"I don't suppose you remember ever seeing me before, do you?"

"No, I don't recollect ever having met you," he said.

"Do you recall the stage robbery on Questa grade back in 1888, and the little shaver who talked to the robber?"

"I sure do! I'll never forget that youngster if I live to be a hundred."

"Well, I'm that little boy."

"No. That's impossible. Why he was only a little ---- Oh, sure. I forgot that he would be grown up by this time."

Jim let out a big roar of laughter and grabbed me in his arms as if I had been a long lost son. Then nothing would do but he call everybody in sight around him while he told of the little boy and the robber and pointed me out as the hero of the incident, much to my embarrassment.

The stage finally got away. I climbed into the front seat with him and we had a good old talkfest. A couple of traveling salesmen in the back seat added to the festivities with their quota of tall yarns.

Finally one of them asked Jim if he had ever done anything besides driving a stage.

He looked at me and winked.

"Yes," he said. "I decided a few years back to give up driving stage and go into the hog raising business. So I got me a little hog ranch up in Oregon and was doing just fine until the rainy season commenced. I had forgot to cut the tails off the hogs and pretty soon I noticed little balls of adobe mud collecting on each tail. These balls of mud kept getting bigger and bigger until they got so big and heavy they drew the skin back so tight over their foreheads that the poor little things couldn't close their eyes and they all died for the want of sleep. So I went back to driving stage."



## HISTORIC PHOTO IDENTIFIED

Remember the grand photo of The Madera-Crane Valley Stage in our April, 1962, issue? One of the members of our Society was quite surprised to see herself in it.

Mrs. Isabel M. Tipton advises this was one of the "Bigelow Stages bound for Sugar Pine and taken in front of what was at that time the lunch room for persons en route to Sugar Pine and North Fork."

Beginning at the right, the man on the ground is Calvin Bigelow, father of H. E. Bigelow and grandfather of Jesse E. On the porch next to him is Mrs. Tipton wearing a large hat and white shirtwaist of the times. Next to her is Mrs. H. E. Bigelow. Leaning on the post is Henry Laurentzen. With hand on the other post is John Mercer.

Driving the stage is Alex Matthews; seated in the middle of the front seat is Lila Hannon Reasnovor. On top is Herbert Bigelow, brother of Jess. The date - approximately 1907 or 1908.

The "Historian" has many outstanding old photos planned for future publications. We hope more of our readers will add to their identification as did Mrs. Tipton.

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## MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

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## CALIFORNIA MISSION MEETING

so quiet and peaceful in the courtyard that the group found themselves speaking softly to each other just so the stillness could sink in. How remote the troubled world seemed. At noon amidst these peaceful surroundings the Novices served a very delicious lunch, which they had prepared themselves, after which the meetings were adjourned and the visit to the missions concluded.

The meetings of the two days as guests of the Franciscan Fathers at two California missions were pleasures the delegates disliked to see come to an end - and they were reluctant to leave the peace of this lovely spot.

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